

DPI VISTA PROJECT



VISTA IMPACT SUMMARY NOVEMBER 2009

The goal of the DPI VISTA Project is to build capacity for family involvement in low-income schools and communities by implementing a research-based, sustainable process for partnerships. Positive effects for the entire community result from this work including:

FOR STUDENTS

- Increased enrollment in more challenging academic programs
- More classes passed
- Better attendance, better social skills

FOR FAMILIES

- More support from school and other parents
- Increased feeling of ownership of school

- Improved awareness of student progress

FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF

- More respect for families' strengths and efforts
- Heightened readiness to involve families in new ways
- Increased satisfaction with family involvement and support

Feedback from Wisconsin DPI VISTA project sites has shown that in general, schools, districts, and community agencies hosting VISTA members are more likely to:

1. Reach families in more meaningful ways
2. Have the time to develop community partnerships
3. Link families to their children's learning
4. Apply for grants related to family partnerships
5. Develop effective communication tools for families and the community
6. Recruit, train, and support volunteers
7. Receive high quality training and professional development

The DPI VISTA Project provides eligible schools and community organizations with three valuable resources:

- **FULL-TIME VISTA MEMBER** (up to 3 years to develop and sustain partnership practices)
- **TRAININGS** (on developing and creating a framework for effective partnership practices)
- **CONNECTIONS AND RESOURCES** (from the DPI and from a network of hundreds of other Partnership Schools)

The DPI supports up to twenty VISTA members per year throughout Wisconsin at schools and community based organizations who serve a high proportion of low-income students.

WHAT IS AMERICORPS*VISTA?

Authorized originally in 1964 by the Economic Opportunity Act, the federal program has provided full-time volunteers to thousands of low-income communities across the nation to address a multitude of problems as defined by those communities.

Nearly 6,000 AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) members serve in hundreds of non-profit and public agencies throughout the country. Known also as the "domestic Peace Corps," AmeriCorps*VISTA is a national service program that seeks to eliminate poverty by setting up and expanding sustainable projects that impact the lives of those being served.

THE MISSION OF AMERICORPS*VISTA

To strengthen and supplement efforts to eliminate and alleviate poverty in the United States by encouraging and enabling persons from all walks of life, all geographic areas, and all age groups, including low-income individuals to perform meaningful and constructive volunteer service in agencies, institutions, and situations where the application of human talent and dedication may assist in the solution of poverty and poverty-related problems to generate the commitment of private sector resources, to encourage volunteer service at the local level, and to strengthen local agencies and organizations to carry out the purpose of the program (42 U.S.C. 4951)

DPI VISTA PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Under our grant, the Department of Public Instruction currently supports 20 AmeriCorps*VISTA members whose sites span the whole state of Wisconsin. These sites serve a high proportion of low-income families.

The grant, administered by DPI's Community Learning and Partnerships Team, is to support the VISTA members in enhancing school or community based agency partnerships with their communities.

The VISTA and the site's Action Team (a group of representatives of the site community) will draw on the resources of the community, the DPI, and the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) to guide the development and implementation of partnership practices. Hundreds of such promising practices have been designed and implemented in schools and organizations around the country and have been collected by NNPS, of which each site is a member. These practices may involve the recruitment and maintenance of volunteers, the

enhancement of family center resources, the implementation of service-learning projects, the incorporation of parents in decision making, or the design of effective communication tools, to name a few.

WHAT IMPACT DOES A DPI VISTA HAVE?

During the summer of 2009, VISTA members and project staff reached out to former VISTA to conduct surveys on their experiences with our program and their VISTA members.

- Respondents indicated that the VISTA had a positive impact on their school.
- Respondents indicated that initiatives started by the VISTA are still in place.
- Respondents stated that with the presence of the VISTA, their sites saw an increase in parental attendance at events and programs.
- In general, respondents noted that the VISTA encouraged sites to recognize that a change of *attitude* was necessary to reach families.

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?

Every year, the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) compiles data on members' partnership progress. Wisconsin schools, districts, and organizations who host VISTA members complete these forms. Results from the 2008-2009 school year are as follows:

SCHOOLS

- ◎ Nearly **70%** of schools report making "good" progress on meeting the challenges identified at their school
- ◎ **100%** of schools are making "fair" or "good" progress on communicating to all families, including non English speaking families
- ◎ **100%** of schools report success in recruiting, training and supporting parent/community volunteers

DISTRICTS

- ◎ **66%** of districts distribute district wide newsletter to families

- ◎ **2/3rds** of districts use surveys to solicit feedback and input from families
- ◎ **100%** of districts identified a budget to implement family-school-community partnership activities

ORGANIZATIONS

- ◎ **66%** of organizations conducted staff development workshops on partnerships
- ◎ **2/3rds** of organizations produced publications and/or reports on partnerships
- ◎ **100%** of organizations made plans to conduct surveys of families at the school or district level for the following year

SITE LEVEL RESULTS

- At the **Howe Neighborhood Family Resource Center in Green Bay**, 91% of those surveyed responded positively when asked about accessibility of programs, staff and information for families at the Resource Center.
- At **Lincoln Elementary School in Oshkosh**, 70% of respondents said this year Lincoln offered more parental involvement opportunities than the previous year
- 96% of parent with the **Wausau Pre Kindergarten program**, strongly agreed or agreed that there were sufficient opportunities for family involvement on a yearend survey. 94% of survey-takers responded positively when asked about opportunities to support the development of parenting skills.
- When asked “on a scale of 1-5 how much progress has been made this year with regards to parent involvement” teachers at the **Business and Economics Academy of Milwaukee (BEAM)** responded with an average of 3.6.

VISTA BY THE NUMBERS: VOLUNTEER GENERATION

Since the inaugural year of the VISTA project, volunteer recruitment has been a critical service VISTAs provide to sites. Volunteers help build the capacity of VISTA sites to build stronger and more lasting partnerships.

	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09
Number of volunteers recruited	1,528	1,578	1,074	1,636	4,007	1,146	1,642
Volunteer Hours	22,456	9,025	8,250	6,340	11,468	6,738	11,002
WI wage equivalent	\$376,362.56	\$151,259.00	\$138,270.00	\$106,258.40	\$192,203.68	\$112,928.88	\$184,393.53